

# COSMOPOLITAN CHRONICLE

True tales from the annals of history, archaeology, construction, and  
restoration of the Casa de Bandini and Cosmopolitan Hotel.  
Old Town San Diego State Historic Park

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## Cattle & Horses.

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The wealth of *rancheros* and families in Mexican California and into the early American period, especially in Southern California, was measured in cattle and horses. Their diet and way of life centered around the cattle. Horses were a very important "tool" for *vaqueros* (cowboys), many of whom were Indians. *Californio rancheros* like Juan Bandini were celebrated for their skill on horseback and their riding ability.

On June 8th 1842, Juan Bandini wrote Abel Stearns, a wealthy Los Angeles rancher and businessman who was married to his daughter Arcadia, to send him three *fanegas* (around 300 pounds) of salt, because he did not have any and it was time to butcher some of his cattle. The salt would be used to preserve the meat and hides.

Correspondence between Bandini and Stearns has been preserved at UCLA, the Bancroft Library, and the

Huntington Library. In most of the letters found at the Bancroft Library, Bandini deals with cattle and horse issues. He and his son-in-law were the owners of several *ranchos* around Southern California in what are now San Diego, Los Angeles, Riverside, San Bernardino, and Orange Counties and across the border into Baja California. These men depended on each other for ranching, business and financial issues that spanned a large section of California.

Juan Bandini helped Abel Stearns in the administration of his ranches. In several letters written in 1853 Bandini wrote about the great effort he had made to take care of some of Stearns' ranches, watching that no cattle other than his graze on his property, and paying the cowboys to deliver the cattle. In one letter dated May 5th Bandini told Stearns that he was happy to help him with his ranches, but he would like a little bit more gratitude from him.

Cattle-rustling was a big problem for Bandini and other ranchers. On January 21st 1848 he wrote that some Indians stole his horses at Los Vallecitos, and in San Juan del Río he had two

more horses stolen by cowboys who were supposed to help Stearns. Bandini was upset that he did not have anybody to take care of his cattle at San Rafael, because he feared that Indians would kill and eat cattle that were not watched. On April 28th 1858, he asked an Indian named Clemente (captain of the Indians) to take care that his Indians did not steal any of his cattle at San Rafael.

In a letter dated April 28th 1858, Bandini mentioned that two of his sons, José María and Juanito (Juan Bautista), were herding cattle from Guadalupe to Tecate and then to Los Angeles to sell them. Bandini asked Stearns to look for some buyers. If he could sell the cattle, Bandini would be able to pay some of his debts and have some money left for the rest of the year.

Cattle, horses, oxen, mules, and other livestock were an important part of means of production of the economy in Old Town San Diego and in Southern California, and family ties were necessary to make a large ranching operation work. Also, without checks for what we today call "sustainability," this economy would collapse.

